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Measuring and Exploring Life Skill Proficiency among Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Everyone needs a set of core competences known as "life skills" to meet the challenges and responsibilities of daily living. Personal growth, academic achievement, and social adaptation are all greatly impacted by secondary school pupils' level of life skill mastery. The purpose of this research is to examine important areas including stress management, emotional intelligence, decision-making, problem-solving, and communication in order to gauge and understand the level of competence in life skills among students in secondary school. Using a mixed-method approach, the study assesses the extent to which life skills are acquired, delves into the factors that impact this acquisition, and proposes ways to include life skills into educational programs.

Keywords: Life skills, School, Students, Problem, Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Academic success is just one aspect of schooling in today's rapidly changing world. Over time, there has been a movement in educational priorities away from a focus on memorisation and test scores and towards a more comprehensive view of education that acknowledges the need of teaching students skills relevant to both their academic and personal lives. Academic pressure, job uncertainty, interpersonal conflicts, mental health issues, and societal expectations are just a few of the many complex and interconnected problems that young people face in today's increasingly complex and interconnected societies. In this light, life skills have become more important since they enable people to deal with the pressures of everyday life, handle their emotions, make good decisions, and keep their relationships strong. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" are what are known as "life skills." The importance of life skills in fostering psychological health, social competency, and responsible citizenship is highlighted by this definition, which also highlights the adaptable and powerful character of these abilities. (Arshad, S. S., & Zaman, S. 2020).

In order to build and evaluate life skills, secondary school students are an important group to consider. Physical, emotional, mental, and social changes occur rapidly throughout adolescence. During this time, people start to develop their sense of self, make their own choices, and plan for the future. Peer pressure, academic stress, identity crisis, and risk-taking behaviours all peak around these developmental milestones. Therefore, it is critical to provide teenagers with solid life skills to help them become more resilient, improve their coping strategies, and promote their personal and academic development. There is a dearth of organised, evidence-based programs in many secondary schools, especially in developing nations, despite the increasing recognition of the significance of life skills. Furthermore, there is a lack of information about the variables that help or hurt students' progress in developing these abilities, as well as their actual proficiency in using them in real-life situations. There has to be a systematic approach to measuring and investigating life skill competency among secondary school students, considering both personal and environmental factors, in order to fill this knowledge gap. (Brown, B. B., & Bakken, J. P. 2011).

Life skills education (LSE) is gaining more and more attention from educators, psychologists, and policymakers for its importance. The inclusion of life skills in school curricula has been supported by several worldwide organisations, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the WHO. Acquiring life competences is an integral part of the development of lifelong learning opportunities and accessible and equitable quality education, both of which are outlined in SDG 4. Within this context, students' success in today's world depends on their ability to communicate effectively, think critically, solve problems, make sound decisions, empathise with others, control their emotions, and deal with stress. Academic performance, job preparedness, interpersonal connections, and psychological well-being are just a few of the many domains that benefit from these abilities. Research has demonstrated that kids who are more proficient in life skills are more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem, fewer rates of behavioural difficulties, and better job

readiness, in addition to superior academic success. Therefore, in order to guide educational initiatives and policy choices, it is essential to know how secondary students now perform in relation to these abilities.

Gender and Socio-Economic Influences

The development of life skills among secondary school students is not an isolated event; rather, it is profoundly affected by a myriad of social, cultural, and economic elements that impact the way these young people see themselves and engage with the world. Two of the most important and interrelated factors among these are gender and socioeconomic status (SES). Students' access to opportunities and resources, as well as their ability to express themselves and the value they place on life skills, are profoundly influenced by these aspects of their identity and surroundings. It is important to acknowledge the institutional imbalances that either promote or impede holistic education, the interaction between individual development and cultural norms, and the impact of gender and socioeconomic status on life skill mastery. (Chakra, A. 2016).

The influence of societal norms and gender roles on behaviour starts at a young age. various socialisation practices for boys and girls in most cultures cause them to follow various paths through childhood when it comes to learning how to express themselves emotionally, communicate effectively, make decisions, and engage with others. For instance, it is commonly emphasised that girls should exhibit qualities such as nurturing, empathy, and emotional expression. Consequently, research consistently shows that female students excel in areas such as emotional intelligence, empathy, relationship skills, and conflict resolution. Additionally, when dealing with emotionally charged events, girls are more likely to seek help and show greater coping methods than boys. The social reinforcement of "feminine" behaviours like caring and collaboration, which are closely related to many of the abilities covered in life skills education, may be a contributing factor to these qualities.

Boys, on the other hand, are often taught to control their emotions, compete aggressively, and stand firm. Although they may be great at making snap decisions, gauging danger, and other leadership-related tasks, they typically fall short when it comes to managing their emotions, communicating effectively, and avoiding stress. When it comes time to regulate their emotions, males may struggle more due to a lack of established coping mechanisms and the social stigmatisation of showing emotion. Life skill assessments can be skewed and underlying requirements might go unnoticed if males, afraid of social judgement, downplay their emotional or interpersonal challenges. It is worth mentioning that there are situations where male students tend to solve problems more independently, while female students tend to make decisions in a collaborative and socially inclusive way. These inclinations are not hardwired from birth, rather they are moulded and reinforced by social influences such as family dynamics, school settings, peer pressure, and media depictions of gender roles. (Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., & Rockoff, J. E. 2014).

There is more nuance than black and white when it comes to the gender gap in the mastery of important life skills. In fact, what they really show is how important it is to implement inclusive and gender-sensitive educational approaches. All pupils, regardless of gender, need to have their gender preconceptions dismantled so that they can develop a well-rounded set of abilities. A more fair and balanced society can be achieved, for example, by pushing ladies to be more aggressive and encouraging boys to acquire emotional intelligence. Educators, guidance counsellors, and curriculum developers all need sensitivity training so they can spot gender bias in lesson plans and help students of both sexes develop emotionally and socially competent skills in supportive environments.

School Environment

In addition to influencing students' academic performance, the school setting has a significant impact on their personal and social development, particularly in the area of life skills. Life skills, which include the ability to communicate, understand others' perspectives, solve problems, think critically, cope with stress, and form meaningful relationships, do not emerge in a vacuum. They flourish in the context of regular encounters, planned activities, and the general atmosphere that promotes learning and development. A poisonous, inflexible, or under-resourced school environment might hinder the development of life skills, whereas a supportive, inclusive, and well-structured school environment can accelerate their acquisition. The educational environment has a pivotal role in determining whether or not secondary school pupils are able to develop, internalise, and apply crucial life competences. This is especially true given the substantial physical, emotional, and psychological changes that these kids are experiencing. (Eragamreddy, N. 2013).

The first and most important factor influencing the development of life skills is the physical environment of a school. A classroom that is well-kept, secure, and furnished with instructional materials, technology, and areas for collaborative work fosters an environment where students are encouraged to actively participate in their own education. Group work, cooperative projects, and student-led initiatives are all great ways to help kids develop important life skills like leadership, communication, and teamwork. Learning by doing, a vital life skill, may be facilitated in a variety of settings, including libraries, scientific labs, art rooms, and sports facilities. These spaces also promote academic and physical growth. On the other side, kids' chances to freely express themselves, explore, and engage socially are

sometimes limited in schools that are overcrowded, have poor sanitation, or lack infrastructure. This hinders the same processes via which life skills are often learnt.

Probably the most important factor in determining how well students do in life skills is not the physical environment of the school, but rather its psychological climate. Factors such as the strength of student-teacher interactions, the dynamics amongst classmates, the frequency (or lack thereof) of bullying, and the general feeling of emotional safety at school are all part of this. Students are empowered to express themselves, take initiative, and manage problems constructively in a good school atmosphere characterised by empathy, inclusivity, mutual respect, and encouragement. Instructors that are personable, emotionally knowledgeable, and encouraging provide a good example for their students by acting out important life skills and providing the opportunity for their pupils to do the same. Important life skills are developed when students are appreciated and heard; they include taking responsibility of one's own learning, expressing one's own views, and making decisions. (Hofmann, V., & Müller, C. M. 2018).

Relationships between teachers and students are also important for the development of important life skills. The development of students' life skills is greatly enhanced when teachers use student-centered teaching approaches, promote open discourse, and encourage problem-solving. In order to help their students learn to regulate their emotions, resolve disputes, and make ethical judgements, teachers need have a firm grasp of teenage psychology and be sensitive to their students' unique needs. Evidence suggests that classroom management, behavioural concerns, and student engagement can all benefit from professional development programs that educate teachers social-emotional learning (SEL) and life skills. Students are more likely to self-regulate, build resilience, and adopt a growth mindset when instructors treat them with empathy, fairness, and high standards. (Rani, S., & Neeraj, M. 2020).

Teacher Perspectives

Among the many stakeholders in the educational system, teachers play a pivotal role and have a significant impact on their pupils' ability to acquire transferable skills while in school. Insights on the acquisition, demonstration, and measurement of life skills among secondary school students are greatly enhanced by their viewpoints. Life skill abilities can be best seen and evaluated by instructors because of the extensive time and effort they invest in interacting with students on a daily basis in a variety of learning and behavioural settings. Aside from their education and experience in the field, the socio-cultural milieu of the schools where they work, the expectations put on them, and the resources at their disposal all play a role in shaping their perspectives. Teachers have a dual responsibility in their classrooms; they direct students' learning according to the curriculum, but they also set an example for their pupils by the way they act, think, and interact with one another. Teachers' viewpoints offer a comprehensive and realistic view of the procedures, obstacles, and outcomes associated with assessing students' competency in life skills, which is an important part of adolescents' development. (Sharma, S. 2003).

First of all, in the opinion of most educators, teaching students basic life skills is essential if they are to thrive in school and beyond. Communication, empathy, problem-solving, emotional management, and decision-making are abilities that they frequently emphasise as very valuable. Students who are more competent in life skills are more likely to take the lead in class discussions, have healthier relationships with their peers, do better in group projects, and cope with stress better, according to many educators. From their point of view, students' motivation, classroom behaviour, discipline, and attendance are all intimately related to life skills. Teachers often notice that kids who have strong interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities are better able to handle challenges, adjust to new situations, and work together, all of which benefit their academic performance and social integration. This association further supports the view held by instructors that the acquisition of life skills should not be seen as an adjunct to, but rather an integral part of, academic education. (Vashishtha, K. C., & Bhardwaj, S. 2006).

Teachers typically encounter several obstacles when trying to integrate life skills into their normal classroom education, even when they acknowledge the value of such abilities. A common complaint from educators is the absence of a well-defined course of study or class time devoted to the development of transferable skills. The majority of secondary school curricula focus primarily on academic subjects, limiting opportunities to intentionally teach and evaluate skills outside of the classroom. Consequently, a lot of educators depend on oblique or accidental chances to impart life skills, such group projects, disciplinary talks, or extracurricular activities. These experiences do teach us a lot, but they aren't always predictable and don't have any kind of structure or follow-up. Many educators have voiced the need for a clear framework outlining the optimum timing for teaching various life skills, how to include them into topic lessons, and what pedagogical approaches might foster students' active participation.

CONCLUSION

Equipping secondary school pupils with the tools they need to confidently and resiliently tackle real-world problems is crucial to their entire development. These abilities are greatly influenced by factors including gender, socioeconomic status, the educational setting, and the assistance provided by teachers. Teachers, in their role as primary facilitators,

see firsthand how children flourish when practical life skills are woven into the fabric of the classroom and the school community. A supportive school climate, inclusive policies, and active cooperation among teachers, parents, and the community are all necessary for children to acquire the life skills they'll need to become successful and responsible adults.

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